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REORGANIZATION--ITS POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR BOARD MEMBERS AND SUPERINTENDENTS.

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THIS MONOGRAPH, VIEWING THE SCHOOL DISTRICT AS A POLITICAL ENTITY, DEVOTES ATTENTION TO BOTH ADMINISTRATIVE AND COMMUNITY PROBLEMS WHICH ARISE IN CONNECTION WITH SCHOOL DISTRICT REORGANIZATION. FOR EXAMPLE, ONE CONSEQUENCE OF REORGANIZATION IS THE ENLARGEMENT OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT. THE LARGER EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM REQUIRES CHANGES WHICH EITHER THE FORMER SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION OR SCHOOL BOARD MAY NOT BE CAPABLE OF EFFECTING. TO DECREASE THE NUMBER OF PROBLEMS INHERENT IN THIS TRANSITION, THE AUTHOR SUGGESTS THAT SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS PREPARE THEMSELVES FOR THE ADVENT OF SCHOOL DISTRICT REORGANIZATION. THIS DOCUMENT IS ALSO AVAILABLE FROM THE OREGON SCHOOL STUDY COUNCIL, UNIVERSITY OF OREGON, EUGENE, OREGON 97403, FOR $1.00. (DG)

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By
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Like it or not, school district reorganization appears destined to continue its dramatic progress across the nation. The day of the little red schoolhouse is all but gone, even though there is no real consensus as to whether its demise is due to saint or Satan. To some, the prospect of reorganization holds four-letter connotations. To others, it is the proverbial "pot of gold at the end of the rainbow." Whether it is "good" or "bad" will be determined by the adults who will emerge after exposure to the "New Look" in public education.

In the meantime, a few things are certain. There will be fewer and fewer, larger and larger (perhaps better and better), school districts. Fewer districts need fewer superintendents and fewer board members. It could be that the true elite will constitute the educational leadership when, as envisioned by leading authorities,[1] the nation's total districts number only about 5,000.

School districts are political entities. The term "district reorganization" implies, among other things, the substitution of a new governmental unit for familiar, generally well-established

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[1]Roald Campbell, Luvern Cunningham, and Roderick McPhee, The Organization and Control of American Schools (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1965) p. 223.

districts. It is a political disruption of the ties which have bound cherished, if sometimes outmoded, traditions and philosophies to district constituents. The theory that unification and consolidation of school districts involves a political--as well as a geographical and functional--reorganization was the prediction for a recent study at Claremont Graduate School and University Center.[2] The belief was expressed that such a realignment is accompanied by changes in the power structure, beyond those mandated by simple superimposition of a single school district government where multiple independent units have existed previously. The study presumed that these changes are reflected significantly in the composition of the first governing board of a reorganized school district.

School board members and superintendents of component elementary and high school districts are inextricably involved in the formulation of reorganization proposals. They share the consequences of judgments rendered by the electorate or whatever body is entitled, by law, to approve or reject such proposals. Composition of a reorganized school district's first governing board reflects the degree to which component districts are represented and is the result of whatever contests have developed over control of policy-making in the new governmental unit.

Selection of a superintendent is generally the first major decision

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[2]Eldon G. Schafer, "Unification: A Change of Power Structure Reflected in Board Composition and Superintendent Selection" (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, California, 1966).

by the board of a newly reorganized district. He may be an "insider," chosen from among the chief administrators of component districts, or an "outsider," not previously employed within the district. The question posed by the study: Does a relationship exist between composition of the first board of a reorganized school district and the decision to select an "inside" or "outside" superintendent?

On the assumption that it is possible to measure the extent to which board composition reflects a change in power structure, it was hypothesized that:

A. The greater the power structure change reflected in composition of the first board, the greater the liklihood that the first superintendent of a unified district will be employed from outside the district.

B. The smaller the power structure change reflected in composition of the first board, the greater the liklihood that the first superintendent of a unified district will be employed from inside the district.

It is generally accepted that there is a time lapse before an "outsider" who joins an organization becomes an "insider."[3] The mechanics of district reorganization often cover a period of several years. It was optionally determined that a component district superintendent who has been in office two years or fewer, prior to a reorganization election, might well be exempt from its political implications. This led to the establishment of the following exception to Hypothesis A:

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[3]For example, two recent studies viewing changes in board composition in relation to superintendent turnover in high school and elementary districts hypothesized a three-year period during which a superintendent would be unaffected by involuntary changes in school board composition. John C. Walden, "School Board Changes and Involuntary Superintendent Turnover," and Robert M. Freeborn, "School Board Change and the Succession Pattern of Superintendents." (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, California, 1966)

> When the first superintendent of a unified district is employed from inside the district (in conflict with Hypothesis A), it will be found that he was employed by his component district within two years of the first board election.

The study dealt with 45 school districts which were formed through reorganization in seven southern California counties between 1955 and 1966.[4] Data were derived from many sources, including responses to four questionnaires, sent to the superintendents of reorganized districts, former component superintendents, the chairmen of county committees on school district organization, committee consultants from the various county schools offices, and to selected board members.

Evidence concerning superintendent selection was related to data regarding composition of first governing boards, the former constituting the dependent variables and the latter being considered the independent variables (relative degrees of power structure change, as reflected in composition of study-district boards). The non-parametric statistical measure, chi square, was used in one of its most common forms--a four-fold contingency table--to deal with the possibly related variables and to determine whether there was statistical significance to the findings which resulted. In testing the hypothesis, "inside" or "outside" first superintendents were distributed in chi square contingency tables on the basis of their selection by first boards which were identified as "high" or "low" change.

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[4]For a more complete summary of findings from this 424-page study, see: Eldon G. Schafer, "Unification: A Change of Power Structure Reflected in Board Composition and Superintendent Selection," Summary of a Ph.D. Dissertation, The California School Administration (Burlingame, Calif.: California Association of School Administrators, Inc., July, 1966), pp. 5-7.

Crucial, then, was a means of determining factors indicative of the extent to which the first boards of newly reorganized school districts did or did not reflect a composite of the last boards of component districts. Four tests were based on individual criteria, which included: the number of component board members elected and defeated; the total number of first board candidates; the percentage of component board candidates who ran and were elected; and represent ation of component district boards on the new unified board. All of these factors were then related in a fifth test using a formula termed the Board Change Factor. The four tests, including the crucial Board Change Factor, were statistically significant far beyond the .001 level of confidence. For the benefit of the uninitiated, a chi square of .001 really means that a particular result could have occurred by chance only once in a thousand tests of similar subject matter.

In light of the extremely high levels of confidence at which the findings were significant, it is considered obvious that the hypothetical framework for the research was sound. Extensive political change resulting from school district reorganization, as mirrored in the first board composition, would seem to be a fairly reliable indicator that an "outsider" will become first superintendent of a new unified district.

This leads to a corollary conclusion that board composition can be used to measure political change in other types of school districts and can be a means of predicting the "inside" or "outside" origin of a new superintendent, regardless of the type of school district organiz-ation.

A review of data collected from the 45 study-districts indicates that the men and women who serve on the outgoing boards of component districts hold a major influence on the future of their component district superintendent after reorganization takes place. Individual decisions as to whether or not component board members will become candidates for the reorganized board are of particular significance. Among related findings revealed by the Claremont study are these of special interest to school board members and superintendents:

1. The opportunity for "insiders" to become the first superintendents of reorganized districts is closely tied to the success of their component board members in obtaining seats on the new district's first board. The record for component board member candidates representing 31 successful "insiders" was 105 victories and only 7 defeats. All but two of the 31 had at least two of their former board members on the unified district board. The 25 component superintendents who were unsuccessful in their bids for the superintendencies of reorganized districts had a total of 31 component board members elected, while 38 were defeated. Unsuccessful superintendent candidates generally had no more than one of their former component board members on the reorganized board.

2. There were no successful "inside" superintendent candidates from the twelve component districts where the reorganization proposal was unsuccessfully opposed by component boards.

3. There were over three times as many elementary board members as members with previous secondary district experience on the first boards of the 45 study-districts. Reorganized district board members without <u>any prior board experience</u> considerably outnumbered those with previous secondary experience. (65 to 45).

There appears to be no question that the trend toward unification of school districts across the nation will continue and that there will be far fewer superintendencies available for educational administrators. At the same time, it seems inescapable that larger, more complex school

systems will require more central staff members to be "specialists" in particular areas of administration.

The problem of what to do with the former superintendents of component districts is one which deserves far more consideration than it has received at this time. Reduction in rank and status is a personal frustration which appears to be an unfortunate, but unavoidable, corollary to educational progress. However, incalculable damage can be done to a school system in the transition years of reorganization by the "reasonable" assignment of surplus component administrators to "specialist" positions for which they are not well equipped or prepared. Unified districts, acting in the best interests of the community must fill key central office specialists' positions with the best qualified personnel available. As to the impact of unification on careers for men and women in educational administration, two recommendations are offered - both concerned with the training of administrators.

1. Graduate schools should require their administrative students to specialize in some phase of administration in depth in addition to the "generalist" training which is common today and yesterday.

2. The impact of mass unification on former superintendents of component districts deserves serious concern and consideration. A means of retraining these men for new specialist roles should be found. In this day of automation such a concept is considered essential to private industry. It seems equally valid and necessary in relation to our largest local business--education.

Could a plan be devised providing incentives sufficient to send "displaced" superintendents back to graduate school where they might properly learn the tools of their new trade? Since this is a national, state, and local problem, perhaps the cost of retraining could be totally or partially

financed on a cooperative basis. The benefit to our educational system seems obvious. Such research would have the potential of far-reaching implications in solving a major problem created by the reorganization of school districts.

A review of the data and conclusions of this study suggests that superintendents may tend to build their own board member power systems either through deliberations or as a result of natural, long, friendly relationships which may act to perpetuate the status quo. This situation is realistic and functional from the superintendent's point of view, but when it becomes a "closed system," in which the community attitudes change without a corresponding shift of thinking on the part of the board of education and the superintendent, it is often a prelude to conflict.

If a superintendent is involved deeply in the power system, he has the uncomfortable task of attempting to modify it as the community changes its philosophy. One might state that he has to create his own genuine but loyal opposition. To be sure, there is risk-taking in this kind of action, but the alternative is almost inevitable defeat of incumbent board members and a resultant dismissal of the incumbent superintendent.

If a practicing superintendent is faced with incumbent board member defeats, or the fact of unification with unfamiliar leadership dominating the newly elected board--in other words, power structure changes--he must move quickly, with accompanying high risk, to meet the new demands if he is to survive. Sometimes he may find that conditions

are such that it is too late to accomplish further leadership for the district and better to leave gracefully than after prolonged attack by those who seek major changes in the educational landscape. To ignore the signs of political change or to pass off a board member defeat at the polls as relatively unimportant is to court disaster of the highest order. Superintendents must stay in tune with the times if they are to offer continuing educational leadership. They must not become isolated from the pulse of community attitudes through long association with incumbent board members to the exclusion of other community contacts. This is not to imply that superintendents should not rely on board members as representatives of community attitudes, but rather to emphasize that they must use these and all other resources at their command if they are to reflect accurately the ever-changing political climate of our communities.